

PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY AND THE VICTIMS OF THE CITY IN MCINERNEY'S BRIGHT LIGHTS, BIG CITY

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Abstract

The present article approaches Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City* (1984) in light of Merlin Coverley's concept of psychogeography to demonstrate the direct authority of the city as an integral part of the protagonist's persona. The idea is to emphasize that urbanity, in its postmodern sense, can function as a culpable agent in shaping up the protagonist's behavior and determining his fate. Therefore, this research studies McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City* to reveal how the life of the leading character—with his unstable state of mind—takes root primarily in his chaotic living environment. A psychogeographic evaluation of this novel allows us to see that urbanity influences the protagonist's psyche, who evinces this deep impact through wandering in the metropolitan Manhattan. Further, this research demonstrates how the city remains triumphant as the protagonist falls into disease and alienation, or is left with an aporetic moment of decision: to unify with the force of urbanity or lose everything to its power.

Keywords: Psychogeography; McInerney; *Bright Lights, Big City*; Urbanity; Postmodern fiction.

Introduction

Some literary works open up with a hint of their cultural context through which their narrative unfolds. The opening lines of *Bright Lights, Big City* fittingly frame the story and the entanglement the protagonist encounters, in addition to the cultural context the novel tries to represent. It begins with the excursions of a drunken, drugged young man at six in the morning in Manhattan, who tries desperately to recover from his shattered life. His wife, a famous model, has left him and his job at a Magazine does not seem to last much longer. And the severity of all this weighs heavily on his mind like an illusion that he can neither hold on to nor can he let go. What haunts his mind probably the most is the question of whether “to live [this] illusion or to lose it?” (McInerney, 1984, p. 1). Indeed, these very first words deftly foreshadow the entire plot of the novel and somewhat reveal how events are going to turn out. The protagonist spends his life mostly in nightclubs, bars, fashion shows and roaring parties only to draw away from the feeling of mortality and the reproaching dawn and morning light.

Such is generally the cultural and social condition people experienced in the 1980s America that stressed a dramatic change towards massive urbanization and radical shift in definitions of reality. The most common ways to address the changes “both geographical and perceptual—are de-territorialization and placelessness. A by-product of this shift is a profound sense of loss and a corresponding deep nostalgia for the world we have lost” (Ellin, 1996, p. 13). Thematization of such causes in literary works, of course, is not something entirely new. Many fiction writers of the time including Don DeLillo, Thomas Pynchon, or Paul Auster portrayed characters undergoing similar conditions in New York. To represent this social paradigm shift, McInerney dedicates a large bulk of *Bright Lights, Big City* to the portraiture of city and its atmosphere. However, a further step to analyze this recurring theme in literary trends of the period, specifically in McInerney's novel, might raise a question: is there any connection between the physical make-up of the city (space) and the psyche of a participant, whose descriptions surprisingly seem only limited to Manhattan and its labyrinthine feature?

The novel is commonly categorized as a postmodern piece of fiction, yet its style is not much consciously postmodernist the way keen readers might expect. Of course, one can easily identify the playfulness of style and content that is expected of postmodern fiction. Most likely, what we notice when evaluating the distinctive features of the novel is the narrative voice or the peculiar rendering of the city. Curiously, both of these two elements are inextricably linked together. The novel uses second-person narrative voice, and the most justifiable theory for the use of such point of view may lie in the sense of alertness it generates for the reader. On the one hand, we can argue that the application of *you* as the only narrative voice is to invite the reader to pay sympathetic attention to the plot and its eventual effect. Indeed, second person point of view “is one of the rare narrative forms where the use of you enters into a truly dialogical rather than merely rhetorical relation with an *Other*” (Rayan, 2005, p. 519). Clearly, this is only one critical assessment we can imagine on this issue. The other side of the argument stresses how it can sharpen the consciousness of the reader who is supposed to be reading a cautionary tale of an unfortunate character. This seems quite likely to be the case of ‘you’ in this novel, which gives the feeling of the fourth wall of the Brechtian theater or a kind of alienation effect which somehow awakens the consciousness of the audience by directly inviting ‘you’ to take a critical distance.

The other feature of experimentation the novel boldly represents relates to the question of setting and space. Perhaps before McInerney, not many authors reshuffled the depiction and role of the city or setting in fiction to this considerable extent. The New York that he describes, however, evokes nothing of the feeling of hope it produced by the American Dream a few decades earlier. Hence, he is subsumed by a sense of purposelessness and hopelessness, and this takes root mainly in an alien culture combined with an unfortunate domestic and public life that torment his mind. It is now easier to understand the first few lines of the novel that desperately invites ‘you’ to walk with him with vigilant eyes in the streets of New York, quite possibly, to narrate how he lost everything over the dark nights of his city.

Of course, the reason for such character development and space description can be manifold. Maria Beville considers this fictional New York as a zone of “uncanny spectrality” which is “decentered, fragmented, and defined by the otherness encountered in the crowd”

(2013, p. 603). Her argument relies mainly on the social paradigm shift which changed the perception of space from its modernist dystopian/utopian features to a postmodern understanding of space which stressed the plurality of metropolitan city. Malcolm Bradbury discusses the extreme sense of alienation the protagonist feels in his life in Manhattan and relates it to the expatriate tradition in American literature as a symptom of “cultural barrenness, absence of forms, and the need for another culture” (1982, p. 6). This certainly is an accurate cultural account of the post-Regan era in the United States that instigated a form of dissatisfaction for American people.

All these interpretations take shape when we evaluate the central character and his clash with a society in which he feels a certain sense of non-belonging. The social or political reasons why the nameless narrator reacts as such is not quite a new issue, but the means and mechanism that encourage his utter confusion and eventual destruction passes unnoticed on the part of scholars. The protagonist wanders all night long and this seems like a literary device or an ordinary part of the plot. Yet, the profundity of his walks can be enlightening when it goes on to affect his psyche to a great deal. This, indeed, creates a psychogeographic connection in which the more he tries to make sense of Manhattan (as a place of belonging), the more he comprehends his mental inability to find a trace of compatibility. A psychogeographic evaluation of the novel can thus be enlightening in terms of what reason may lie behind the way the protagonist reacts to his environment and what the novel intends to represent culturally. Furthermore, it can give us a newer understanding of postmodern literature in the final years of the twentieth century that incorporated the theme of urbanity in its postmodern sense.

Postmodern Fiction and Psychogeography

The term psychogeography was introduced as a part of the Letterist International (LI) and Situationist movement and was first coined by Guy Debord in 1955 as a method of coming into direct contact with urban environment through drifting around for mental identification. Initially, it was defined as a political and social strategy that attempted to challenge the capitalist modes of influence and dominance in overtly consumerist societies. Although psychogeography fell out of favor for almost two decades after its initial popularity, it attracted attention once more in the sphere of social sciences and humanities in the latter decades of the twentieth century. Later, however, it nudged its way into literature as an interdisciplinary approach to lay bare the pressure that the modern streets and environments may exert on individuals.

Only in recent years has this movement achieved a higher recognition in the domain of literature thanks to the publication of *Psychogeography* (2006) by Merlin Coverley. In his book, he describes this concept as the juncture at which “psychology and geography collide” in order to “study the specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals” (p. 10). It makes clear the direct connection between one’s deepest thoughts (psyche) and their living environment. For Guy Debord and his collaborators—who formed the well-known Situationist International group (1957)—psychogeography meant “drifting through the city for days, weeks, even months at a time, looking for what they called the city’s psychogeography” that helped

them identify “forgotten desires—images of play, eccentricity, secret rebellion, creativity, and negation” (Marcus, 2002, p. 4). They journey through urban spaces, and this shapes psychogeographic mental maps that for them “express not subordination to randomness but complete *insubordination* to habitual influences” (Debord, 2008, p. 26) that rises against capitalist hegemony that favors uniformity of the mass consciousness. These explorations through the topography of the postmodern city help the passer-by to gain an authentic insight about the marginalized, the forgotten as well as the cherished space of everyday life.

The present article deals with McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City* and its protagonist's psychogeographic journey through New York. First, it discusses how the city atmosphere shapes the mind of the nameless protagonist to such extreme measures that he loses his ability to consciously form a sound understanding of his life and existence in the metropolitan Manhattan. This geographical and psychological process goes so far as to create a Baudrillardian hyper-real effect on his mind that in turn pushes him one step closer to his eventual failure. Finally, succumbed to social and urban mechanism of life in his surroundings, he comes to face an aporetic moment of decision: either to live a life of illusions or lose it all, which in any case does not seem to improve his condition much.

The Man's Experience Defined by the City

A considerable proportion of the novel revolves around the aimless walks of the main character in Manhattan city-center filled with glaring lights and buzz of the city. “Into the heart of the night [they wander] wherever there are dances to be danced, drugs to be hoovered, women to *be* Allagashed. It's a dirty job but someone's got to do it” (McInerney, 198, p. 42). It is possible to believe that even the narrator himself enjoys wandering and the feeling of being lost in the city. His life is filled with regret and afflictions that make it no surprise for such a lonely individual to occupy himself in the whirlpool of strange faces, huge glamorous shopping malls and nightclubs, perhaps to remain oblivious to the misfortunes he went through. He feels traumatic, and thus he compulsively bears the thought of unification with his alluring environment since he finds the origin of his misery rooted in the urban space around him. Initially, he freely walks and drowns himself in drugs and delirium. He describes his involvement with the city in terms of “Drugs, Delight, Decadence, Debauchery, Dexedrine, Delectable, Deranged, Debilitated, Delinquent, Delirium” (p. 7) that shows his concurrently paradoxical attraction and revulsion toward his life in Manhattan. His description reveals the serious dramas he might have been through; each of which could have cast him into more trouble and madness.

Walking functions as more of a habit that urges him to start daily on “the Upper East Side with champagne and unlimited prospects, strictly observing the Allagash rule of perpetual motion: one drink per stop” (McInerney, 1984, p. 2). This brings into the background the *flâneur* tradition of aimless walk. Unlike what psychogeography highlighted, which involves conscious and intentional strolls, *flâneur* relied less on intentionality and aim. The way the novel firstly describes the protagonist can be rather a claim on the protagonist's lack of intentionality and more on his attachment to the city. He convinces himself that his

“mission in life is to have more fun than anyone else in New York City, and this involves a lot of moving around since there is always the likelihood that where you aren’t is more fun than where you are” (p. 3). This is because he knows that “in the modern city the man of the crowd must adapt or perish” (Coverley, 2012, p. 155). Yet, in spite of his endeavors, he cannot pace himself with urban life and soon he finds himself not one with Manhattan since the “city’s economy is made up of strange, subterranean circuits that are as mysterious to you as the grids of wire and pipe under the streets” (McInerney, 1984, p. 86). Such is his initial bitter-sweet comprehension and experience defined by the city as he, in turn, tries to define the city he inhabits.

The narrator establishes a deeper emotional connection with the tortuous streets and the bright lights of the big city for his perception comes to take an unconscious and internalized form. His understanding of life and the city appears to be more fragmented, as he grows more caught up with life in the metropolitan Manhattan and resorts to occasional drugs and drunkenness as drifting around the city. His compulsive retreat to the streets of Manhattan turns out to be a mechanism by which he means to come to terms with his life by going back to the source of his fall. Contrary to his expectations, the city atmosphere permeates gradually the boundaries of his mind and even the atmosphere of his house. He often returns home hoping to find himself a place for placidity of mind and order of thought. Surprisingly, he loses his home to the disarray of the urban exteriors as well. “Your apartment is a chamber of horrors,” explains the narrator, “there are instruments of torture in the kitchen cabinets, rings in the walls, spikes on the bed. That place is must-to-avoid” (McInerney, 1984, p. 80) for his mind has given in to the city atmosphere almost entirely. He knows that to walk out in the streets means that “there is a special purgatory for you out there in the dawn’s surly light, a desperate half sleep which is like a grease fire in the brainpan” (p. 8). This uncovers more suitably the connection between the characters and the urban fabric.

The influence of the urban life intensifies to the extent that his contact with urban structures finds it complete dominion over his mind and living space. “The sound of the tumblers in the locks of your apartment door puts you in mind of dungeons. The place is haunted,” (McInerney, 1984, p. 37) says the protagonist about his apartment. He continues to note that in his house “memories lurk like dustballs at the backs of drawers. The stereo is a special model that plays only music fraught with poignant associations,” (p. 37) showing the deep impact of desperation into his daily life and psyche. Indeed, the city remains essentially a haunting specter that imprints its form and features upon his living quarters to a great degree. Damian O’Doherty (2013) appropriately argues, “the relation between the city and its constitution is complexly folded into the human body and its mind where an intimate relation is found to exist between the alignment and energies of the body and those of the city” (p. 213). It is of little surprise that the narrator in McInerney’s declares, “your soul is as disheveled as your apartment,” (1984, p. 32) quite possibly to make clear the indivisible relationship between life in the city, one’s home and the individual’s psyche. In fact, the fate of such character is closely tied with the “fate of the city he inhabits and his very existence acts as an indication of the struggles later generations of urban walkers will have to face as the city is redeveloped in a manner increasingly hostile to their activities” (Coverley, 2006, p. 20) and, of course, their freedom.

The urban conditions further affect his mind to the point that he feels mentally conflicted. His nocturnal walks around bars and nightclubs reinforce his sense of attachment and lead him to more frenzy. "You sit down up front. The bus lurches into traffic. Below Fortieth Street the signs on the corners change from Seventh Avenue to Fashion Avenue as you enter the garment district," (McInerney, 1984, p. 87) to find traces of Amanda. He gets delusional and only thinks about the confusing streets that echo "Amanda's old stomping grounds" (p. 87). Yet his desperation makes him wonder if he can find her in the slums of Manhattan where "they sell women without clothes and below they sell clothes with women" (p. 87). He truly becomes one with the city and finds his quests to be of no result, all because he knows he cannot make do with the city: "New York, the club scene – you're tired of all that" (p. 3). The monstrous façade of the city intimidates his whole existence since the streets and the urban conditions that define them have the capacity to take unfathomable forms. The claustrophobic spaces and routes he chooses to pass reflect his dedication to restriction and, therefore, the innards of the city are the complicit agents that hasten his mental fall.

One can recall Thomas De Quincey (1785-1859) as a classic example of urban walker whose obsessive drifting parallels identically with the conditions walking creates for the leading character in McInerney's. "The perplexities of my steps in London came back again and haunted my sleep, with the feeling of perplexities moral or intellectual, that brought confusion to the reason, or anguish and remorse to the conscience," (2014, p. 41) writes De Quincey of his nostalgic, opium-led walks around the transformed London. This partly reminds us of the beginning words of the narrator, which summarized how "messed up" he was while he had "no place to go" (p. 10); words he hopelessly keeps repeating to himself in the course of the narrative. This demonstrates how his restrictive mindset – produced by the unvarying response from and observations of the city – engages him with a circle of convergence in which where he starts is exactly where he ends up finishing. It is understandable why his movements around the topography of Manhattan increasingly bring him more anguish and confusion.

Awareness of Hyperreality: Trying to Define the City

The protagonist's narrative of his itinerary lifestyle reaches a critical phase when he finds his consciousness torn between illusion and reality, recognition and oblivion. His exhausting confrontation with the city and the environment to redeem the things he has lost proves unavailing, and he begins to think how he has been profoundly powerless to live according to his conscious will. He declares, "You are the stuff of which consumer profiles-American Dream: Educated Middle-Class Model-are made" (McInerney, 1984, p. 151) to indicate his stance against the capitalist authority. He attributes his lost job, money, and wife to the perplexing living society that dazzles his eyes and an American Dream he chased symbolically by walking compulsively. This inevitably turns him into a low hanging individual and denies him the reality he deserves.

Bright Lights, Big City pictures the plights an individual experiences as he tries to regain what was repressed by the mechanisms of an indifferent society. His desire for the dazzling nights of New York is a symbol of obliviousness and unreality. For him, the

“sunlight is excessive” (McInerney, 1984, p. 13) and upon walking during the day the sun’s “glare is like a mother’s reproach. The sidewalk sparkles cruelly, visibility unlimited” (p. 8) making him believe that upon walking during the day “mortality will pierce you through the retina” (p. 6). No wonder that he finds it “nice” to “hole up in the nearest bar. The glare from the sidewalk stuns you,” (p. 27) for he is supposed to drown himself in drinking and drugs, but not thinking. The narrative mentions his habitual reading of *New York Post* and the issues he often comes across including headlines like “Death Fall From Sky, Sex Fiends, Teenage Terrorists, Tough Tots, Sicko Creeps, Living Nightmares, Spontaneous Human Combustion, Miracle Diets, Coma Babies, [and reports on] Missing Persons” (p. 11) that gradually make him feel “The *Post* confirms your sense of impending disaster” (p. 57). More accurately, his real life led by his conscious thoughts and decisions is invaded by a society of the spectacle that absorbs his mind and controls his psyche.

The story mainly hinges on the leading character’s quest for Amanda; a character whose absence for the protagonist embodies an unreachable American Dream and a false hope and consciousness on which the narrator frantically depends. Upon her absence, he nostalgically replaces her memories with a mannequin he sees every day at Saks Fifth Avenue:

You stop in front of a window. Inside the window is a mannequin which is a replica of Amanda-your wife, the model. To form the cast for the mannequin, Amanda lay face down in a vat of latex batter for ninety minutes; breathing through a straw... You stand in front of the window and try to remember if this was how she really looked. (McInerney, 1984, p. 68)

While his obsession for a mannequin might epitomize a yearning for some unattainable entity, we could also interpret it as an unrealized dream. As he is busy with life, the mannequin, and Amanda, he almost never realizes that accessing truth and reality is made almost impossible because of the consumerist metropolitan city that stands in his way to reality. Jean Baudrillard pertinently states, “Nothing could be more intense, electrifying, turbulent, and vital than the streets of New York [...] filled with crowds, bustle and advertisement, each by turn aggressive or casual” (1988, p. 18). Living in a place like Manhattan is evocative of the mechanism of the survival of the fittest in which the weakest is objectified by all institutions of power like nightlife, bars, *New York Post*, tortuous streets of lights, drugs, and mannequins. Through bombardment of information and representations, a postmodern capitalist society and authority deprives one of his individuality and desire for reality.

To put the events into their historical context, we should possibly date back to Reagan era of the 1980s during which “privatization of the public space” was the vogue since the government firmly bolstered an economy that depended heavily on “private sector rather than sluggish government bureaucracies” (Cannato, 2009, p. 75). It was a time when people were recovering from the severe repercussions of Vietnam War that wrecked the country’s economy. Reagan, of course, came to power with the hope of improving it. People, especially youngsters and yuppies, celebrated this shift and embraced a life of limitless enjoyment occasioned by the use of drugs and drinking. Yet, it is a relatively accepted fact that critics

of the 1980s see Manhattan as “a time of greed and economic materialism, military waste and jingoistic belligerence, growing inequality, a lack of concern for the poor, and a rolling back of gains for the rights of minorities and women” (p. 71). McInerney, indeed, cues us more accurately to this spirit of the period in his *Brightness Falls* (1992) as well when the narrator blames Manhattan for Cornie Calloway’s instability of mind: “Living in the city, she felt bound up in a delicate, complex web of interdependence and she was determined to play her part. The misery as well as the vitality of the metropolis seeped into her psyche” (p. 79). It is not strange, therefore, to confront “successive simulation, as hyperreality seems to be at the core of the contemporary debate on *space* and *place*” (Hönnighausen, 2005, p. 50), particularly in its urban aspects.

The Provocative Walks as a Resistance Strategy

Bright Lights, Big City is primarily composed of two paradoxically interconnected narrations: one deals with silence and obedience to the power-laden, hyperreal effects of life in Manhattan of the 1980s, and the other narrates the later active awareness and resistance of the narrator against the consumerist life and its mental preoccupation. The narrator’s mind occasionally rises to consciousness and takes a new approach into analyzing the events around. The central declaration which makes the reader rather sure of his characteristics as a typical twentieth-century individual is probably when “sometimes [the protagonist] feel[s] like the only man in the city without group affiliation” (McInerney, 1984, p. 57). Such a character acts like an unattached observer-hero who earnestly longs for the truth and reality. He proves on occasions that his excursions through the topography of the city motivate him to think critically. He thinks, “Your presence here is only a matter of conducting an experiment in limits, reminding yourself of what you aren’t” (p. 4). Indeed, apart from numbing his consciousness, drifting in and around the city functions as an experiment and a new definition of the self as well. Yet, this is not what capitalist centers or hyperreal forces like to embrace.

In effect, his act of walking serves as a form of subversion and reconstitution. “Eventually you ascend the stairs to the street,” tells the narrator about the start of another of his provocative walks, thinking of “Plato’s pilgrims climbing out of the cave, from the shadow world of appearances toward things as they really are, and you wonder if it is possible to change in this life. Being with a philosopher makes you think” (McInerney, 1984, p. 93). His itinerary movements around Manhattan’s mysterious landscape, labyrinthine streets, and large buildings encourage him to explore new facts, realities. This creativity of mediation and imagination is essentially made possible when he takes a detour and starts walking the “Village [street], pointing out landmarks and favorite townhouses” (p. 93). Visiting this place is important because it makes “you remember how much you used to like this part of the city” (p. 94). “The streets have friendly names and cut weird angles into the rectilinear map of the city. The buildings are humble in scale and don’t try to intimidate you” (p. 94) when he adventures into forgotten areas of the city. His action symbolizes what lies at the heart of psychogeographic concern of “cutting across established routes and exploring those marginal and forgotten areas often overlooked by the city’s inhabitants” (Coverley, 2006, p. 12). This perfectly outlines the movements of the modern man who detests banality and seeks liveliness.

It is interesting to know that, even in reality, Village street in Manhattan is reputed for being a site of “magnet for the East Coast counter-culture” and “a popular hangout for the Beats and then a nightclub” (Nevius, 2014, p. 5). It is certain that such a place is a last resort for the modern cast-out who feels plagued for living in simulations and illusions. For the narrator, it is poignant to know that the report of the ‘Missing Person’ he read in *New York Post* was about his mother, whom he had forgotten completely long ago. It is after being informed about this misfortune and his wife’s second marriage that he becomes rather disillusioned. These make him realize that “Amanda is a fictional character, you say. I made her up. I didn’t realize this until recently” (McInerney, 1984, p. 139). Or that “on Cornelia Street, where you first lived with Amanda in New York. This was your neighborhood. These shops were your shops. You possessed these streets as securely as if you held title” (p. 133) contrary to the time when he was drawn to walking the restricted atmosphere of Manhattan, which paralyzed his psyche.

In its political and social sense, psychogeography, like Surrealism and Dadaism before it, seeks to hold on to its “characteristic political opposition to authority” (Coverley, 2006, p. 12). In this regard, “the city becomes a riddle, a puzzle perplexing writers and walkers” (p. 17) much similar to the way McInerney’s protagonist experienced it. Karl Marx puts it well that “it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness” (1973, p. 5). Yet, as the narrator resists mentally and his walks extend beyond the city spectrum, his walks turn to function as a form of opposition. He, in fact, proves to be emblematic of individuals who suspect this mass uniformity of the city and its consequent attachment. Upon walking endlessly and obliviously, he becomes tired to a degree that “your brain feels like it is trying to find a way out of your skull. And you are afraid of almost everything” (McInerney, 1984, p. 179). His desire for resistance strangely dwindles notably when he spends time with his best friend, Allagash. His role as a motor of mental oppression and a big influence on the narrator is crucial since Allagash is symbol of a well-integrated persona to the postmodern model of the city. He represents a blind faith in the sway of the postmodern atmosphere of indifference and playfulness, and a “night of Allagash” (p. 32) seems like a terrifying experience for the narrator to be lost in the whirlpool of confusion, sensuality, and aimlessness as they journey through the city. Indeed, the presence of Allagash deprives him of his awareness and functions as a call for a deeper ironic alienation and passivity. On the other hand, his mother’s death along with other unexpected events evoke his critical consciousness: “After the funeral it seemed as if you were wandering around your own interior looking for signs of life, finding nothing but empty rooms and white walls” (p. 162) that bespeak of his deep immersion with urban exteriors.

Precisely, the city streets in the novel contribute directly to the way the protagonist contemplates about his life. Two mental motives facilitate this process: First is his repetitive and compulsive act of walking – as the only solution to which the protagonists resort – to hold on to a possible form of reformation and re-identification. Second, the act of repetition causes the urban atmosphere to affect his psyche as well as his appearance. Elizabeth Grosz relates this form of inscription to one’s body image which can be “individually, sexually, radically, and culturally variable” (1994, p. 79). Accordingly, the protagonist shares all these characteristics as well since he attempts to preserve his private, marital and social life

from harm as he goes through a psychogeographic experience. The point we should bear in mind is how his subordination to his living environments is "involuntary" (Grosz, 1994, p. 80). More accurately, the space in *Bright Lights, Big City* permeates the boundaries of his psyche and affects his decision-making ability despite his will and inclination.

The very last stage of a psychogeographic experience is the ultimate aporetic moment of decision it creates. The protagonist undergoes occasional fluctuations of perception from active awareness into deep confusion, which gives rise to a discernible sense of ambivalence and indeterminacy in his character. He loses his ability to make sound decisions which, in turn, helps create a passive persona shaped up largely by the environment. The empty rooms and white walls of his mind illuminate his inability to come to terms with his urban life. In fact, the presence of white walls, empty rooms and nothingness signify one's submission of mind to a sense of uncertainty. "You're not sure exactly where you are going. You don't feel you have the strength to walk home. You walk faster. If the sunlight catches you on the streets, you will undergo some terrible chemical change" (p. 180). This clarifies the nature of ambivalence that inheres in his decisions and thoughts.

An aporetic consequence of confronting alien spaces of urbanity is what the protagonist experiences in the end. We should probably remember the opening lines of the novel, which offered the duality of living an illusion, or losing it that in any case provides nothing close to an effective resolution to a confliction. This is exactly what the narrator faces: a blockage of mind, a non-road, in effect, or to borrow from Jacques Derrida, an issue of "either/or" (1993, p. 15) that puts to test, "both an impossible and a necessary passage" (p. 17). The novel ends with the narrator on his knees not sure whether to live his illusory life of lies, hyperreal effects and futile efforts to continue to seek an unreachable American Dream; or to lose it all that, in essence, is closer to an impossibility for him. This irreconcilable duality is complemented by a feeling of degradation for he is left with nothing and nowhere to go in the very end:

You get down on your knees and tear open the bag. The smell of warm dough envelops you. The first bite sticks in your throat and you almost gag. You will have to go slowly. You will have to learn everything all over again. (McInerney, 1984, p. 182)

Conclusion

To sum up, we can see that the narrator, in this novel, initially goes through troubling consequences of his direct contact with urbanity. He finds himself in a strange world he can no longer endure and this encroaches upon his psyche to a point that he becomes an indifferent urban walker lost in the whirlpool of consumerist propaganda. As crucial in this regard is the narrator's presence as a "nostalgic figure [who] symboliz[es] not only the birth of the modern city but also the destruction of his former home" (Coverley, 2006, p. 20). A deeper appreciation of the novel exposes the mechanisms of psychogeography operating at the heart of events and shaping the protagonist's mind. His consciousness is profoundly unified with the city's urban structures; he confronts hyperreal forces created by the modern society and endeavors to recover the loss. His walking is an act of subversion since he becomes resistant after moving to slums and forgotten areas

of Manhattan. He is a victim of the city for he is left with nothing but a non-road, thus an aporetic moment of decision as an end result of the inherently complex relationship between space and his psyche. Hence, it is to the point to understand *Bright Lights, Big City* as a postmodern narrative which tries to voice the decisive influence one's city and society can exert upon his fate and psyche. This paves the path for future interdisciplinary researches to employ the element of setting and space – specifically in postmodern fiction – in order to scrutinize literary pieces.

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